

"A Historic Past"



"A Bright Future"

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**MINUTES
CITY OF DELAWARE CITY
MAYOR & COUNCIL MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, April 11, 2022, at 6:30p.m.
DELAWARE CITY COMMUNITY CENTER - GYMNASIUM
250 FIFTH STREET**

SPECIAL MEETING OF MAYOR & COUNCIL - TO DISCUSS HOUSE BILL 355

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Johnson called the April 11, 2022 Special Meeting to order at 6:33p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Barrett, Council Members Konkus, and City Manager Baylor were present in person. Via Zoom, Council Member Saunders, City Solicitor Rhodunda, and Police Chief Henderson were in attendance. Mayor Johnson said that with two council members present and one on Zoom there is a quorum.

NEW BUSINESS

1) Discussion Of House Bill 355

Comments from Mayor Johnson: He called this "Special" meeting to discuss all the issues and concerns of House Bill 355. If this bill passes, there will four appointments to the Fort DuPont Redevelopment and Preservation Corporation Board (FDRPC). There will be 2 seats appointed by the Governor, 1 seat from

the Speaker of the House, and 1 seat from the President pro tempore of the Senate. City council will “nominate” these four individuals to the state government, but council will not have an actual vote. Of the four members, two have to be residents from Fort DuPont and two from Delaware City. If this bill does not pass, and changes are not made, there are concerns that the Fort DuPont project could lose funding. He is hopeful that House Bill 355 will improve the working relationship between Fort DuPont and Delaware City. *He is in favor of House Bill 355.*

Comments from Paul Parets: Vice Mayor Barrett asked Paul Parets (a member of the FDRPC Board of Directors) to say a few words about “how it all started” with Delaware City annexing Fort DuPont. In April 2016 (by a vote of more than two-to-one) the city voted to annex Fort DuPont to Delaware City, with the understanding that the city would have four representatives on the FDRPC Board. Legislation has been introduced this year to change the entire make-up of the board of directors. This would call for Delaware City representatives to the FDRPC Board to be appointed by the Governor and General Assembly (rather than Mayor and Council). This proposed legislative change was done without the knowledge of the mayor, city council, or city manager. Mr. Parets asked if the legislature and governor are “obligated” or “only considering” the city’s recommendations for the four seats? Mayor Johnson said that he has had personal assurances from the governor and the city’s legislators that the “four people will be from Delaware City and Fort DuPont.” Mr. Parets is concerned about the occupants of those seats in future years, and if there will still be the same residency requirements.

Comments from Vice Mayor Barrett: She was initially hesitant about House Bill 355, but after studying all its components, she feels confident in having the Governor and legislature appoint the four board members. The Mayor and Council will still “recommend” the names to be appointed. She is very concerned that if the bill does not pass, and the funding is pulled, the projects at Fort DuPont won’t be finished (or not finished on schedule) since the city does not have the money. *She is in favor of House Bill 355.*

Comments from Council Member Konkus: She feels that the former Director of the FDRPC did not work well with its own Board. Fort DuPont’s Board has been lacking in leadership and oversight, and she feels that House Bill 355 will provide more legal “language” for guidelines and improvements. She asked if the residents have any recommendations for these four positions, to please let Mayor and Council know. If House Bill 355 does not pass, and Fort DuPont gets defunded, what will that picture look like? They need to think about that possibility. *She is in favor of House Bill 355.*

Comments from Council Member Saunders: He has read the bill multiple times, and he feels its introduction was a result of the ineffective “working relationship” between the FDRPC, the Executive Director of the FDRPC, and Delaware City officials. There is a sincere intent of the city to work better with the new Executive Director and Board. If House Bill 355 passes, it is a “good thing” that out of thirteen seats on the Board, the city will have four. We all must work together and look at each other’s perspectives to be success and move ahead. *He is in favor of House Bill 355.*

Comments from City Manager Baylor: He introduced Carolann Wicks, the interim Executive Director at the FDRPC. Also, he is “the acting chairman” of the FPRDC Board. With all the publicity regarding Fort DuPont, there has been a feeling from the General Assembly that “something needed to be done” to ensure things are moving in the right direction, moving forward. The legislators want to ensure that the

Fort DuPont residents' voices will be heard. He said that if all the involved parties don't stop fighting, and start working together, "we will all lose." He wants everyone to try hard to work together for the common good. *He is in favor of House Bill 355.*

CITIZENS QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Bill Rahn / Officers Row Fort DuPont: He wants the amendments to Bill 355 to be discussed. He wants more transparency. What is going to be done with the very large house on Officers Row that Jeff Randol has been residing in? He thinks it should be sold. Are the rental homes, rented at market rate? City Manager Baylor said that the house should be sold and all leases reviewed for market rate accuracy. He also feels that Fort DuPont employees who rent, should pay the same amount as the general public. There should be no more "executive sessions" at Fort DuPont which will help with transparency.

Susan Rahn / Officers Row Fort DuPont: She has "concerns" with Sen. Poore and Rep. Longhurst. She has asked for their help for over two years with Fort DuPont issues, but they make promises, and nothing is ever done. She does not feel that Fort DuPont employees should reside on the property. To her, it looks like either the bill gets passed or we lose all funding. City Manager Baylor said it may look that way, but our state representatives are fighting for the city. They are trying to tell us, that there is "some hesitancy," among their state colleagues to continue to fund the Fort DuPont project. He feels that Delaware City needs to reform things to restore all the legislators' confidence in the FDRPC investment. He is doing his best to see that the funding is continued. Mrs. Rahn asked if Sen. Poore and Rep. Longhurst talked to council before drafting the bill? Council Member Konkus added that there is constant dialogue between the city council and the state representatives about Fort DuPont. Mrs. Rahn asked if there is going to ever be an audit of the FDRPC's finances, since she definitely feels there has been obvious mismanagement? City Manager Baylor said that he can bring it up to the FDRPC Board.

Unknown Resident / Fort DuPont: What voice does council have in the state to "endorse or not endorse" this bill? Mayor Johnson said he wanted to see how council felt as a body and not individually. Also, to get this "on the record." The hope is to pass on to our representatives, the feelings and opinions of the community about this bill.

Michael Graci / Fort DuPont: He discussed the number of FDRPC board members and potential number of new board members if the bill passes. Considering the four seats to appointed, will they be "recycled and reappropriated," or is council looking at "assigning current members" to fill those seats. Mayor Johnson replied that the city is not far enough long in the process, but would probably accept resumes from those interested (including interested current members). Then council would make the recommendations.

Eric Smith / Officers Row Fort Dupont: He also discussed the number of FDRPC board members now, and if the bill passes, what would their roles be.

Unknown Resident / Fort DuPont: She asked if these four appointments have "terms attached?" Can a board member be changed at the request of mayor and council (after they are appointed by the state)? City Solicitor Rhodunda responded. (His response could not be clearly heard).

Unknown Resident / Fort DuPont: She asked why this bill was not communicated sooner to residents? Moving forward, how do we know residents will be informed in a timely fashion? She is very concerned about this.

Unknown Resident / Fort DuPont: Is there a timeline of when this bill goes to the floor? Mayor Johnson was unsure of the exact timing, but hopes to have mayor and council's recommendations tonight, so the city is prepared.

Tim Konkus / Delaware City: He feels "it speaks" very well for the way council is handling this issue, and that it definitely shows transparency.

Unknown Resident / Fort DuPont: Is it possible that Sen Poore and Rep. Longhurst can just ignore all the thoughts and opinions from this meeting? Mayor Johnson said yes, because at the end of the day, the city is subordinate to the state (and all we can do is make recommendations). Mayor Johnson reiterated his view, however, that he is confident the city's representatives will take the issues around this bill seriously and consider the city's recommendations.

Council Member Konkus made a motion to support House Bill 355, as amended with House Amendment One. Council Member Saunders seconded the motion. A roll call was taken, and all members present approved. The motion passed 3 – 0.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Johnson entertained a motion to adjourn. Council Member Konkus made the motion. Vice Mayor Barrett seconded the motion. Mayor Johnson adjourned the meeting at 7:40p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Tina Pincus
City Secretary*